
THE QUALITY OF LIFE

MAJOR RESOURCE OF FAMILY HEALTH

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Abstract

Family is generally the main structure of education and character building. A united, cohesive family is a well integrated component within the concept of 'life quality'. In this paper we will thus try to briefly define all the elements that lead to the welfare of the family and to the increase of the life quality.

Keywords: quality of life, health, family

1. Introduction

Although at first glance the expression 'family: basic cell of society' seems to be demonetized, it is superfluous to say that family is the vector, by which the economic and social goals and the objectives of the economic and social development policies are achieved [1, 2].

In the world we perceive, we relate to and act not only like natural human beings but also as social beings, it is the process of 'breaking away' that needs to mark the modern transfer of responsibility. This is built by the new spiritualization of the global citizen values, which, thinking globally, manifests locally not only at the level of family love, but also on work, faith and hope for the best [1-3].

The family of love is the family within which individuals find the natural, social and spiritual frame for a life lived besides their loved ones. They produce and reproduce human life in terms of the model they assimilated through traditions, cultures and beliefs within different communities [1-3]

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2. General information

Within the landscape of European family, many changes have occurred over the last four decades, especially in the case of the people living in Central and Eastern Europe. Adopting new changes into the individual and family behaviour was much slowed by the existing political context 'on this side' [1-3].

Within the fluid social environment, governments were asked to respond by appropriate measures to the encountered problems. Due to the fact that the scale of social problems has repercussions on the rhythm in which a country develops, they need be known, anticipated even, influenced in their advance, because these problems have effect on vertical as well. To achieve this, a situation considered to be ideal, to which the political and specific objectives are established, is used as starting point [1-3].

The issue gains importance for Romania, not only in the new economical and social context of the transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy, when both the content and the nature of policies implementation change, but also in the context created by the integration in the EU, when the free movement of people and goods accelerate the pace of economical and social changes. Changes also occur by incorporating individual information in family's behaviour [1-4].

Demographic, economic and social changes brought unprecedented modifications in the family structures and household composition. Increasing divorce rates, declining fertility and increasing female participation in the labour force, shook the traditional family image, where the mother is the one who takes care of the family, and the father is the one who earns income [1, 2].

Of particular interest within the modification of the social-economical context is the meeting point of the economical changes with the changes occurring in the family, within the context of global transformation. These meeting points are among the most challenging changes society encounters, in terms of politics, the evolution of social phenomena related to families and family practices [1, 2, 4].

Among the many challenges faced by economy and society we are pointing out the few most important. Firstly, a new work culture arises around the world [1, 2, 4]. The emergence of a knowledge society and of a knowledge-based work is a recurring theme in the economical restructuring and in globalization. Contrary to expectations the traditional division of labour among sexes seems to consolidate, with great consequences on the inequalities within the families [1, 2, 4-10]. The new culture of work has unexpected influences on families, through its members, who are struggling to acquire knowledge and skills for new jobs that require other qualifications and worse, often disappear. The family, within the industrial society, is laden the same way as before: the mother remains the prime caretaker (socializing entity) while families become increasingly dependant on the income of the woman and even of the teenagers who work as part time untrained workers. The adjustment speed must be fast and the contradictions within this process are high. This leads to conflicts within the

traditional model of the family - what a modern family should be like and what it really is [1, 2, 4-10].

Secondly, there is now a massive restructuring of the economy, both here and in many other countries. This includes changes in global trade patterns and practices through the emergence of regional agreements in the field. They have influence over domestic savings by increasing or decreasing employment in different sectors. These cause changes in monetary policy, both within the state and within international financial institutions, greatly influencing unemployment, the movement of capital and of people between economic sectors and countries affecting the social welfare policies [1, 2, 4-10].

On the other hand there are great changes in the way individuals and families regard occupation, employment, career and security deriving from employment. For an increasing number of people, occupation is neither guaranteed nor fully expected.

There are new concepts like 'un-occupancy', which define the forced early retirement process, without the possibility of rehiring.

All these represent challenges for the family and they require learning how to adapt to the changes in employment and to the mismatches between family life and an active life. Age becomes thus an important aspect in the restructuring of economy. In the post-industrial society there is a come back to the age criterion regarding work and employment. This means that the families' habit of relying on a middle aged man's or woman's income is increasingly replaced by the reliance on the income of the young or old ones [1, 2, 4-10].

Another important socio-economical change is the rejection of the idea of a lifetime maintenance career. In developed countries people have no longer only one job or career until retirement. They have several successive or even simultaneous ones, between which they attend retraining courses [1, 2, 4-10]. The pioneers of this discontinuous career model used to be the women. Men came into the play later. This means that classifying families by employment status or age cannot be accurate anymore, because individuals and families continually learn new ways of living in the family and possibilities for harmonizing active and family life [1, 2, 4-10].

3. Family - health at risk?

Within a modern society, a modern family is rapidly founded on different values, with a lower awareness of its original covenant 'For better or for worse'.

As times change, the family gets another form (Table 1). A trend of the last 50 years lies in replacing traditional family models, containing several generations with the core family made up only of parents and their children. Most of the time, this family contains a single parent. We are thus witnessing a decrease in the number of family members, down to 2.8 in developed countries.

Table 1. The family, within modern and traditional societies [1, 2].

	Traditional society	Modern society
No. of simultaneous marital partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Monogamy ➤ Polygamy 	Monogamy
Partner's choice	The choice is made by the parents in order to strengthen the families' power.	Quite free choice made by the partners
Residence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Patriarchic ➤ Matriarchic ➤ Both 	Not local
Relationship to power	Patriarchic relationships, rarely matriarchic	Power relatively similar between men and women
Relationship parents-children	Parental authority and dominance	Great tolerance, comparable equality parents-children
Functions within the family	Focus on the protection of the kinship group, as a whole.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Safe environment for children ➤ Moral support to marital family members
Structure	Extended	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Core ➤ Alternative family models

We can find the main causes for this fact within a few social phenomena, highlighted by the U.N.'s Social Policy and Development Division, namely [1, 2]:

- Increased migration - 175 million people live nowadays outside the borders of their country of origin;
- Decreased fertility rate of 1.57 children per woman, in developed countries;
- Increased divorce rate;
- Global aging of the population, which increases the medical care and home care of these people. There are currently 606 million people, of ages over 60 living in the world. In the year 2020 a triplication of these figures is expected.

Families form much harder than before, are less frequent, and form at a more advanced age. The conclusion is supported by the decrease in the percentage of non-celibate women. Among those born in the 1930's, at least 79% were non-celibate. Among those born in 1967 the percentage dropped to 62%, while the 62-79% interval represents the modal range for European countries. In Sweden the proportion of single women approaches 40%, for the ones born in 1965. The average proportion of single women born during the last years of the seventh decade of the last century exceeds 20% in European countries and the trend is increasing. There where is a large proportion of women of 45 and older who never got married, the free union tendencies being confirmed by the women with children born outside of marriage [1, 2, 4-10].

In the developed countries more than half of the 20-24 year old women live in cohabiting unions. In other countries, like Denmark, France, Finland, England, the proportion of the cohabiting couples reaches 20% [1, 2, 4-10].

The changes within the formation of families also affect remarriages. Till recently, divorce was often followed by a remarriage. But as more and more people divorce, they postpone marriage and choose cohabitation. Remarriage during the 90's not only decreased, but happened at a much later time after the separation than during the 60's [1, 2].

The divorce rate has slowed or changed the trends in many developed countries, including the Nordic ones, those from Eastern Europe, USA and Canada, where these were conventionally high. Sweden and the U.S. still have the highest divorce rates, followed by England, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Nordic countries and by the former USSR countries (about 40 out of 100 marriages). In Europe divorce seems to be growing among the younger generations. The highest probability of divorce is within the first four years of the marriage [1, 2].

The proportion of single mothers (unmarried and non-cohabitant) in developed countries is small. In Europe, (except for the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland) many of the births given by unmarried women occur during cohabitation. For older women, postponement of the first marriage explains the increasing number of births given outside wedlock [1, 2]. Although the majority of teenage mothers are married, a significant proportion of adolescent girls become mothers, as unmarried women. More than half of these teenage mothers are unmarried in France, Germany, England and USA.

The changes affecting the model of marriage entailed also other changes. One of these is the apparition of families with single parents, in which the single parent is often the mother. In Europe the percentage of single parents fluctuated between 1991 and 1998 between 14% and 22%, with rising tendencies in some countries. In Ireland and Great Britain, the percentage of children living with only one parent more than doubled compared to the previous survey of 1983 [1, 2, 4-10].

Families headed by single mothers incline to be economically less well situated than those run by single fathers. Single mothers with children under the age of 3 are less likely to be employed than married mothers with children of the same age. The support of the extended family, the quality and the availability of nursing services for children are some of the several aspects, which influence the women's possibility of working outside their home [1, 2].

Decreasing fertility combined with an increasing lifespan lead to bigger proportions of older generations. Almost twice as many men than women over 60 have been married. The discrepancy is caused by the widowhood, which differs considerably between men and women in incidence and impact. There are much more widows than widowers in the world (on average 4 to 1), due to the fact that men get married at a higher age, they have thus a shorter life expectancy and remarry more often than women [1, 2]. Their longer lifespan and the prolonged state of widowhood have made women economically vulnerable.

The majority of women is financially dependent on their husbands or male relatives during their life and/or is more and more implied in unsure business fields or have poorly paid jobs, which do not insure the right to pension. Widowed women living alone risk social isolation and their health problems progress often undetected [1, 2].

The new family model is therefore defined by the reduced frequency of marriages, the increased frequency of permanent celibacy, the advanced average age on the first marriage, the postponement of childbirth, the decreased number of children and by the increased frequency of childbirths outside wedlock. All of the above are however accompanied by an increase in divorce rates [1, 2, 4-10].

Marriage recognized by law and custom is however sanctioned by civil and religious authorities and implies obligations for both partners. This marriage type remains the dominant form of partnerships. Besides this form of union, alternative forms started to spread more and more.

A shocking example of the family of the third millennium, but also a challenge for contemporary society, can be found in Africa, where the largest number adults suffering from AIDS are living. In a relatively short period of time it is estimated that the African family will consist only of teenagers and grandparents [1, 2].

Can we live in any way, or do we still need a family? The criticism on the topic of the family determined during the 19th century the emergence of the idea that family can be replaced by other communitarian cohabiting models. The most important example from the contemporary communitarian life is the kibbutz. This represents a community of families and individuals, who cooperate in order to raise the children. In Israel there are over 250 kibbutz encompassing approximately 100000 members. Each kibbutz behaves as if it was a single family unit, and the upbringing of the children is seen as a responsibility of the entire community. In some of them, children live in expressly built 'children's homes'. Over the years most kibbutz opted for more conventional living arrangements so that today these 'children's homes' may be considered rather places, where child surveillance services are ensured, rather than places that express the collective responsibility for their upbringing [1, 2, 4-11].

The increase in the number of people who opt for alternative family models thrives due to objective social processes and phenomena, which caused alterations within the family structure and purpose [1, 2, 4-11]:

- Engaging women in activities outside of the family unit;
- The territorial mobility process;
- Urbanization and modernization;
- Increasing economical independence of the young people;
- Increasing the population's level of education;
- Increasing social permissiveness to new behavioural forms.

The real impact of family disintegration cannot be quantified yet. We cannot however be mindless on two aspects as a potential response. The first one refers to the antisocial behaviour of uprooted children, to the suffering of the poorly cared for and isolated elders. The second one refers to the nostalgia

regarding the traditional family, the only one that provided stability, strength, safety, spiritual fulfilment and success to its members [1, 2, 4-11].

Even the World Health Organization launched, on the occasion of its tenth anniversary of the International Day of the Family, a resolution by which it recognizes the importance of the families' and communities' active role on protecting their own health. The already mentioned document calls for a reassessment of the traditional approaches in creating new and better models of care, within which health care should take into account each individual, as part of a family [1, 2, 4-11].

Family analysis has important implications regarding the economic policy statements and impacts, which require fiscal austerity measures in order to reduce public expenditure on health and education. Due to the fact that family is one of the most important social environments, inside which people get sick and become healthy again, it needs to serve as a primary unit for medical treatment. Family determines whether a person becomes ill and family is the one who initiates the search process and the use of medical services. The role of the home and of the family, as opposed to hospitalization, as a place for the care of serious illnesses in children and adults, has been well demonstrated in industrial countries [1, 2, 4-11].

Such an approach, including post-operative, has been tested in developing countries, even in poor urban environments. Not only the expenses were lower, but also the recovery and restoration of the functions were significantly improved.

It is assumed that regarding the transition from medical care to prevention, the knowledge of the family and its separate members gain a greater importance [1, 2, 4-11].

Regardless of how confident we are in a developed society's operating system, one can not overlook its limits, namely when it does not rely on the support of the family as a place of development for future generations [1, 2, 4-11].

4. The familial situation in Romania

The lack of security and predictability of economic developments associated with the shock caused by the transition led families to adopt an 'extremely conservative' behaviour concerning fertility or, to be more precise, the conscious decision not to give birth to more than one or two children per family [1, 2, 11].

The fertility index dropped in almost 15 years from 1.8 in 1990 to 1.3 in 2004, while the total population has decreased in the same amount of time from 23.2 million to about 21.7 million [1, 2]. The number of marriages has receded in Romania between 1996 and 2001 from 150.4/100 000 inhabitants to 129.9/100 000 inhabitants; simultaneously the number of divorces decreased from 35.6/100 000 inhabitants in 1996 to 31.1/100 000 inhabitants in 2001 [1, 2].

In 1960, Romania was in the leading group concerning the number of marriages, if only the first marriages are considered. The average age at the first marriage was one of the lowest in Europe and the percentage of children born out of wedlock was likewise one of the lowest [1, 2].

Further development of these indicators occurred in a negative direction. Thus, a continuous decrease of marriages number took place in the following years, culminating with the lowest post-war value of 5.8‰ in 2001. This number has receded in the last decade at a rate three times higher than the previous three decades. However, Romania was permanently located among the countries with the highest values of marriages [1, 2].

The first marriage rate had about the same evolution. Despite the fact that the average age at the first marriage increased in Romania as it did in the other European countries, it still remains one of the lowest on the continent. The divorce rate was comparatively constant in these four decades [1, 2].

An exception of this continuous decrease, though the overall situation is positioned within the highest values in the European context compared to the other indexes – virtually fitting into the picture - is represented by the extramarital birth rate. From the aforementioned place in the category of the lowest values in 1960 and 1980, Romania tends towards a leading position judging by the values recorded in the recent years [1, 2, 4].

Comparing the average age at the first birth with that at the first marriage, one may notice that marriages are contracted more frequent after the appearance of the first child. Consensual unions become more frequent and represent in Romania the first established form in which young people settle down for the first time [1, 2, 4].

The family model's evolution in Romania is the same as in Europe. The European family model is also evolving. After the removal of administrative boundaries, the fluctuation of people and ideas is easier and the pace of change is more alert [1, 2, 4]. Social problems originating in the aspects of the family models, which are now more common in Western Europe, will also increasingly spread in our country [1, 2, 4].

An alarming consequence of the changes intervening in the Romanian family model is the downward trend in the population, as well as the permanent damage to the population's age structure, a degradation already announcing multiple implications on the sustainability of social security schemes. In other words, the danger is actually the heavily unbalanced demographic structure of the population, having major economic and social consequences for the labour market, the pension insurance, health and education systems, the population's incomes and expenditures, etc. [1, 2, 4].

5. Conclusions

We can therefore reason that [1, 2, 4]:

- Changes in the family, especially in recent decades, have altered its roles and functions, but in spite of this, it continues to be the essential pillar for

the growth and welfare of its members. It is the basic unit of production and consumption and therefore also vital to the economy. The family is the engine of the socio-economic development process.

- Difficult economical problems, socio-political changes and the shift in traditional values have brought the family back in the centre of attention.
- Never in history occurred so many and dramatic changes in such a short time span. The speed of the changes is a stressor for the family.

Family traditions have become obsolete and new ones are launched or are in process of acceptance. In the same time, they are the trigger for new changes. Whatever the cause, many of the traditional features of the family are part of the past, many of the stereotypes or conventions used to describe them being obsolete and unrealistic [1, 2, 4].

‘The new times’ force us through their actuality to look at the traditional family again, which involves a reformulation of the values and needs of contemporary man, as well as the mutual support between generations ‘For better or for worse!’ [1, 2, 4].

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